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Statement submitted by Mother of Hope Cameroon Common Initiative Group, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Enhancing Women and Girls Access to Technology and Communication in Advancing Sustainable Development

Enhancing access to opportunities for women and girls to information in all forms online and offline is a fundamental human right and a catalyst for their empowerment to be equal contributors to societal issues and development. To ensure gender equality, women and girls need to be trained and they need to be given the opportunities from a young age, as well as measures are being taken to create an enabling environment free of intimidation, security threats and harassment against women and girls.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) recognizes key issues that relate to the leading insecurity of families. Articles 3, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) highlights States' responsibilities to ensure the equal right of men and women in the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights with respect to opportunities. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW, 1979) in its article 11 strongly reiterates the need for States to take appropriate measures in eliminating discrimination against women

According to many studies carried out, it shows that women are marginalized in the media and information and communication industries both in representation as well as in way women are portrayed in the media sector. Although there has been an increase in the number of women representation in media, they mostly occupy junior and non-decision-making positions and very few of them occupy high-level decision-making positions in media and telecommunications organizations. This shows the reluctance of media organizations to incorporate fair gender sensitive guidelines.

With the coming of new information and communications technologies, the media now has far reaching and widespread effects because it has opened many forums that groups of people and most communities can now have access to and participate in media and information and communication technologies. The spread of these new information and communications technologies give women the opportunity to express their views to a wide variety of audiences without the bottlenecks that are found in the traditional media (radio, television). Through the new information and communications technologies, women are educated and empowered in almost every aspect of life (politics, agriculture, entrepreneurship, education, health, etc).

Despite these many opportunities offered by information and communications technologies, many women still face many challenges. For example, some women do not have easy access to information and communications technologies and others do not even know how to use them. Women are under-represented in companies that design programs used in media, information and communications technologies and this reflects in the gender Insensitive content found on the internet about women. The few women who find themselves in these companies usually occupy junior land low paid positions like secretaries and clerks while men dominate in high paid managerial and engineering positions. This is not because women are under qualified and are incapable of handling such posts of responsibility but because the male dominated industry is designed to maintain women at the junior level and hinder them progressing in the company's hierarchy. Not training and hiring qualified women in senior managerial and decision-making positions in the media, information and communications technologies industries could have a negative economic effect not only on the woman but the whole community as well because it will imply less jobs created and less financial and intellectual wealth utilized.

For women to be able to fully participate in media and information and communications technologies, it starts with empowering the girl child right from the primary education level where she has to be given as much exposure and access to ICTs as the male child. She must be encouraged to take up and excel in the sciences, mathematics and computer sciences so that she too can have the opportunity to venture into software and hardware engineering. For the gap that exists between the female gender and the media, and information and communications technologies industry, she needs to be educated and given the opportunity to prove her worth in this male dominated industry.

In concluding, woman can successfully integrate in the media and information and communications industries and this will empower the woman financially, engage her intellectually and even open up further forums and gender sensitive contents that can have a far-reaching effect in terms of sensitization and information, even in the conception and design of gender sensitive contents found on the internet.